

**The interaction of broadcasters, critics and audiences in shaping the cultural meaning and status of television programmes: The public discourse around the second series of *Broadchurch***

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**Abstract**

The meaning and cultural standing of a television programme is not predetermined or set. Indeed, it changes over time from before the broadcast of the programme, to when it is shown, and after. Over this period, and beyond, different parties will struggle, negotiate and seek consensus over a programme's status and reception. In this article I will develop a concept of media engagement in relation to such a process. To help delineate this concept I will focus on how broadcasters, critics and the public in the United Kingdom interacted over ITV's second series of *Broadchurch* (2013–17). I will explore how the producers created a publicity image of the programme to position it in popular and critical debates. As I do this I will identify some of the main strategies being followed by media organizations and the related textual and discursive devices utilized in their publicity output to achieve these aims. I will then seek to identify and explore how critics and audiences responded to the broadcaster's publicity image. However, as I argue, while, with the use of social media, the importance of the public might have increased in such debates, the broadcaster and critic still have a role in framing such discussions and, at least for the critic, in providing a final summation of the public mediated discussion once a programme has finished its run.

**Keywords**

critics

television criticism

public discourse

PR

promotion

public sphere

*Broadchurch*

## Introduction

If the scholarly work published in the field of television studies is assessed, much of it can be seen as concentrating on changes occurring in the industry (Gomery and Hockley 2006), the way meaning is produced (Gorton 2009), the appearance of new textual forms (Nelson 1997), shifting processes of globalization and localization (Chalaby 2009), the impact of new technologies and regulatory and policy changes (Bennett and Strange 2011). The focus, as one would expect, is on the medium of television, its production, distribution and consumption (Creeber 2006: 5–7). However, in recent years more work has started to appear, which concentrates on the various processes, organizations and texts that surround television and its output, including those on paratexts (Dawson 2011), marketing and promotion (Grainge and Johnson 2015), connected viewing (Holt and Sanson 2014) and TV criticism (Rixon 2011). One reason for this increased attention has been the development of new technologies that are changing the whole media landscape. While much of this new work has focused on the way the television industry is responding to new technologies, how the audience has become more active through social media and how the nature of the television texts are being transformed, few have looked at the changing role of the critics and the critical and popular debate that occurs around a programme. I will, in this article, focus on this often forgotten discursive interaction occurring between television critics, producers and audiences; those who engage in a public discourse which helps define the shared meaning

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and success of television programmes. While digital technologies might be disrupting this interaction by allowing greater access to audiences to input into this discussion, I will argue that critics and broadcasters, with their regular access to the media and publicity resources, are still able to play an important role in the shape taken by the public discourse.

In the first part of this article I will develop a concept of engagement as a means of understanding the way a critical public debate occurs around a television programme. I will identify how different actors are able to dominate or shape the debate and how this might be changing with the onset of new technologies. Such a concept helps to delineate the discursive process by which a programme comes to be positioned culturally and critically within a particular social and cultural environment. It will help identify the roles taken by different actors in the discursive interactions, and how various strategies, devices and tactics are utilized to try to position the text or, indeed, to resist such attempts. I will divide the concept of engagement into three moments or phases: the pre-publicity phase (pre-engagement), the broadcast phase (engagement) and the post broadcast reflection phase (post-engagement). Engaging with each other throughout these three phases, different actors or groups seek to articulate their views of the programme. The three groups I highlight within this concept are the broadcaster/producer, the critic and the public. At different moments one of the actors might, if they are more able than the rest to articulate their views, be dominant in the debate. For example, in the pre-engagement phase the broadcaster will often be able to use their ability to control access to the programme to create an advantageous publicity image of the programme. One of the main reasons for developing such a concept is to understand the role of the critic in helping to provide a consensus in public debates, one that is particularly pertinent in the post-engagement phase when the final critical reflection of a programme is provided, and to question whether this is now changing with the impact of new technologies that have allowed members of the public new access into mediated television debates.

In the second part of this article, to allow a degree of refinement and critical reflection to occur, I will use this concept to explore the way a public engagement occurred around the second series of *Broadchurch* (2013–17) in the United Kingdom. To help undertake this analysis I have used a range of different sources, including: industry documents (to identify the strategies of the broadcasters and producers); various publicity releases relating to *Broadchurch*; reviews and articles by television critics working for the national press, which were published before, during and after the broadcast of the programme; and, lastly, the interactions of members of the public about the programme found on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. At this stage the aim is not to create a decisive and finalized concept but to begin, tentatively, to outline one that can help provide an insight into how a public debate occurs around the meaning, acceptance and cultural standing of a programme and how this is changing.

### **Media engagement: Strategies, devices and tactics**

Couldry suggests that we live in an intertextual world, one with so many texts that it increasingly begs the question: which ones should we look at and how (2000: 67–78)? To help ‘negotiate a path across vast textual fields’ (2000: 72) we look to different means to find our way. One group that has played an important navigational role for the viewer is the TV critic, whether working for the traditional media or, increasingly, operating through new media (Rixon 2011). In many ways they act on our behalf, watching, decoding and reflecting on television as a medium, as well its output. They then produce secondary texts, such as previews and reviews, which circulate around the primary text, acting discursively to provide evaluations, judgements and frames of understanding. They act as part of an entry way paratext, helping to frame the way an audience will approach a text (Gray 2010: 209). They do this by telling the audience the genre of the programme, who stars in it, what the main

focus of the storyline might be and, most importantly, whether it works. This prepares the viewer for watching the programme; it helps frame the audience's expectations. In their turn, producers engage with this area of public discourse to try to position their programmes, to shape the way they are received and understood, such as with the use of a publicity release. The viewers and readers of the programmes and associated secondary texts can, if they wish, actively interact with this discursive field, something that has increased with the use of social media. At certain moments of textual or discursive engagement or interaction between producers, cultural critics and audiences, programmes might, perhaps temporarily, develop a shared meaning and a particular cultural position or status, though one often still in dispute. Such an engagement is fluid, with myriad shifts occurring over time as different actors seek to understand, to persuade, to reflect and to discuss the text(s) in question.

Fiske conceptualized the interaction of the industry, critics, audiences and fans as operating along an axis (1994: 118–19), with the critic, sitting between the industry and the audience, taking on a mediating role. However, such a view is simplistic without mapping the more complex interaction that can occur between the different parties and gives little reference to the temporal nature of such discursive exchanges. The concept of a media engagement, however, can offer a more dynamic, nuanced and complete view of the interactions occurring between all the different actors over a period of time. This is an encounter in which all parties are active at some moment, one where they interact to create some new outcome, such as an updated publicity release or a shared view on a programme. Taking this as a starting point I would suggest that there are three moments to such a temporal engagement occurring around a television programme: the pre-engagement, that which exists before its screening; the engagement, the moment when the programme is broadcast; and post-engagement, when the programme finishes its run and some kind of consensus might appear. Overall, such a view suggests that an engagement encourages a

movement from an initial view of a programme, position 'a', to a final consensus, position 'a<sup>1</sup>'.

To help locate the different terrain where such discussions or engagements might manifest themselves and their relationship to the actual programme under discussion I will use Fiske's ideas of the primary, secondary and tertiary texts (1994: 108–27), though I will accept that, with increasing convergence and the emergence of forms of transmedia storytelling, the notion of a programme as a single text is problematic (Shimpack 2010: 48–65). However, even in the case of a transmedia text, I will argue there are still three phases: the moment of planning before the release, the actual release of multiple texts and the moment of critical reflection after the texts have been consumed in some form. Though, these moments might overlap and interrelate more than they would do for a more traditional television programme. In this way the programme or series, or in the case of transmedia programme the various constituent texts or parts, will be viewed as the primary text; the secondary text are those forms which critically reflect on or refer to the primary text, such as reviews or press releases; and the tertiary text represents the discussions of the public about the programme and the secondary texts. As new communication forms, such as Twitter, have developed, so have they impacted on these discursive sites and processes to such a degree that there has been a shift of focus. Indeed, at times, the public's discussions on social media, a form of tertiary text, have become the main focus of some secondary texts. To help understand what might be happening with new technologies I will loosely use the idea of spreadability (Jenkins et al. 2013), to show how interactions around a programme are increasingly ranging over different types of texts in a rich and dynamic way. This can include the text or programme itself spreading out across different media – e.g. from television to the Internet – but also in terms of publicity and associated public debates spreading out across a

range of different arenas and media, such as from newspapers to online discussion sites and to Twitter.

For Michel de Certeau large organizations, like broadcasters, are situated in positions of power and, as such, develop and take on strategies or goals to maintain their survival and encourage success (1984: 35–36). However, a strategy is but an aim, and for this to be achieved these have to be actualized through the use of what I will call devices: a device, for the concept of engagement, is the mechanism by which the organization seeks to interact and engage with the discourse around a programme, for example, via specific aspects of a press release. Likewise, media organizations that employ critics also have their own strategies and aims, which could include a need to create content to attract a particular demographic readership. To do this they might employ critics who exhibit certain values and are able to work to a specific brief. However, the critic, who is employed as an expert using their own knowledge and values to write critically about television (Rixon 2015), might, at certain moments, work against the strategies of the broadcasters and their employer. They might do this by utilizing particular tactics, which lead to them resisting an organization's strategies (de Certeau 1984: 29–42). Examples of tactics taken by critics in relation to the strategies of the broadcasters or their employer might include ignoring the views found in a press release or perhaps criticizing programmes liked by their readership. Likewise the audience, at certain moments, might follow certain tactics to escape the strategies and devices of both the broadcaster and critic, such as not watching a well-publicized and critically praised programme. By using these concepts one can begin to understand the ongoing struggle and shifts of power that occur around the status and meaning of a television programme and what emerges from such an encounter. I will now start to explore the usefulness of the concept of engagement through an analysis of the public mediated discourse which appeared around the second series of *Broadchurch*.

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### ***Broadchurch: Struggles over meaning and cultural status***

In 2013 ITV had a surprise hit, *Broadchurch*. Indeed, with an average consolidated viewing figure of 9.4 million per episode it was considered a runaway success (British Audience Research Board [BARB] 2015). This size of audience is one often more associated with the heyday of UK television, a time when there were only a few channels and the ratings were often very high for popular programmes (Albertazzi and Copley 2013: 523). The critical reception for the series was very good, with it winning four BAFTAs and craft BAFTAs in May 2014 (<http://awards.bafta.org>) and the critics at the *Radio Times* making it their TV series of 2013 (Anon. 2013). Some viewers even became ardent fans ('broadies') setting up their own fan pages on the web (e.g. <http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/broadchurch>). The resulting public discourse signalled that it was not just a popular programme but one that took the crime genre to new heights. But it was also a sign, along with other similar series, that British television could make the kind of noirish crime programmes usually being produced, to some acclaim, by Scandinavian producers (Creeber 2015: 27–29). However, for many it seemed a one-off. The series had ended with the case being solved and the murderer awaiting trial. As the programme focused on a particular small town it would be far-fetched to have another series about a murder there. However, in January 2015, a second series appeared. It would seem that the producers would have a struggle to position the series as a successful extension of the first series. I will now look at how the broadcaster, in the pre-engagement phase, created a publicity image as they sought to position their programme in the critic's and publics' minds.

#### ***1. Pre-engagement: Creating a publicity image***



In many ways the broadcaster dominates the pre-engagement phase. At this moment the programme has not yet been transmitted and the broadcaster is able to use its control over the access to the production to determine what information is publically available. Though, recently, programmes have escaped such embargos by being released unofficially online; as happened, for example, with *Game of Thrones* (2011–present) (Russon 2015). As any organization will do, the broadcaster tries to define how its products will be viewed and received. Often this is thought of as protecting and building on the television company's overall brand and associated channel and programme sub-brands (Ellis 2002: 165–69; Johnson 2012). To do this producers and broadcasters will, using their internal departments and sometimes external promotion and marketing organizations (Grainge and Johnson 2015), present a way of understanding and positioning their programme (as well as their channels) by creating what John Ellis (1982: 24–33) calls, in relation to the similar practise in film, a 'narrative image'. I will refer to this here, in relation to television publicity, as a 'publicity image'. This has traditionally been constructed by the broadcaster using their own media outlets, for example via trailers and linked publications, such as the *Radio Times* in the case of the BBC, and press packs (Rixon 2011: 67–99), as well as through other forms of marketing such as billboard advertising. Increasingly, many broadcasters now also use new digital forms of communication as part of the marketing mix, e.g. social media such as Twitter and Facebook (Grainge and Johnson 2015: 119–47). While the press pack is created mainly to attract the interest of the media and the professional critic – hoping to shape their response to the programme before they might have even seen it – the trailer, adverts and new media are mostly used to communicate directly with the public, trying to present a framework for understanding the programme but also, as part of the increasingly connected viewing experience, to encourage some form of active online engagement.

One aim of a promotions department when creating the publicity image is to promote the programme in line with the overall strategies of the broadcaster, which are important in helping to decide the overall direction a company wishes to go in as it seeks to prosper and survive in a competitive environment (de Certeau 1984: 35–36). The manifest organizational strategies of ITV, the broadcaster which commissioned *Broadchurch*, can be found within its annual reports and official documents. In these documents three main overall strategic aims are evident: to maximize audiences and revenue share, to grow their content business internationally and to build a global pay and distribution business (ITV 2015: 7). However, if one analyses the document further one can see related sub strategies which connect specifically to their programme output. For example, such documentation states that ITV believes its broadcast channels should showcase their best content, helping it to gain prestige that can help them sell the content on internationally (2015: 7). *Broadchurch* Series 1 is mentioned in the document as a programme that has worked in relation to such a strategy, attracting a large home audience and gaining various awards and critical acclaim, which helped it to be successfully sold abroad. In relation to the producers of the programme, Kudos and Imaginary Friends, their websites suggest similar aims ‘to work with the best global talent to create, develop and produce popular, innovative and award winning drama’ (2015). These strategies feed into the way television organizations operate, into decisions about what they commission, how they schedule their programmes and how they promote their programmes. One way they promote and market their programmes is by the use of press packs.

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For the second series of *Broadchurch*, the press pack (ITV.com) is headed by theidents of those companies connected to its creation: ITV, Kudos and Imaginary Friends. As one might expect, one of the most important devices used within promotion and marketing is that of association (Martens 2013: 91). This can be seen here operating in two main ways:

first, there is an attempt to associate the brand of the broadcaster and producers with the series. The aim is to link, in the mind of the critic, the reputation of production and broadcasting companies and their channels and programmes with the new series and, also, should the series be successful to link it back to the programme makers to strengthen their brand. Second, the success of Series 1 is mentioned in a number of places associating it with the new series; e.g. *Broadchurch* was 'ITV's most tweeted about drama series since records began: 470,000 tweets' (ITV 2014: 3). By placing this in the press pack the aim is to encourage critics to believe that Series 2 will have similar success; that it is part of a successful sub-brand.

Another device that is often used in marketing and promotion is the hook (Marsh et al. 2015: 92). I will use this term here to explain how a broadcaster will try to attract the interest of the critic by showing them that a programme is unique and distinctive and why it is worth watching. This device helps identify for the critic the intrinsic quality or uniqueness of the programme in a hope they will be both attracted to watch the programme and to reproduce the hook, in some way, in their review or critical writings. Interestingly, in the case of Series 2 of *Broadchurch*, it is a question of absence which, in some ways, acts as a hook. With the press release providing little information about the main storyline, there is an attempt to build suspense or excitement around the mystery of what the series will be about. As there were no pre-screenings available, the critic had to rely on the information provided by the broadcaster, including this mystery about the storyline.

Those behind the creation of the press release will often also use the devices of celebrity and stardom to position the programme in the minds of critics, an approach that has a long history in Public Relations (Wernick 1991). For *Broadchurch* the press release mentions the main actors in a number of places, including David Tennant, Olivia Coleman and Andrew Buchan, and even includes a number of short interviews with them where they

reflect on being involved in filming the series, what they felt about the locations used and the work of Chris Chibnall, the writer. What they do not mention, however, is the storyline, which has at this moment an embargo placed on it by the producers; indeed, it was reported by many newspapers that they were all made to sign non-disclosure agreements about the series (Anon. 2014). The use of actor's names with the publicity supports the previously mentioned idea of association as some of them link the two series, offering a suggestion that the ingredients which underpinned the success of the first series of *Broadchurch* are also to be found in the second series. The press pack openly forefronts the pedigree of the series, with references to the awards the actors have been nominated for or have won, such as the Academy Award, BAFTA and Golden Globe nominated actor Marianne Jean-Baptiste (ITV 2014: 2). We are also told, in several places, that this is the second series of a multi award winning drama (2014: 2). This idea of quality is also supported by the press pack including a piece of writing about the series by the writer and creator, Chris Chibnall. His inclusion is a sign that – as is often the case with British drama productions – this is the work of an auteur and a quality production, and not the output of a team, something that in the past has often been associated with more commercial American productions and ideas of mass production (Cooke 2003; Akass and McCabe 2007: 9–10; Nelson 2007: 39–40). However, some team-written American productions are critically acclaimed series, often helped by the existence of a showrunner, usually the main scriptwriter, who provides the authorial oversight for the series (Mittell 2015: 87–94).

In this pre-engagement phase, alongside the press pack, ITV also used – as other broadcasters would do for some high profile programmes – a series of trailers. The first ones began to run on ITV and on social media in December 2014 (initially released on Vimeo). As part of the wider marketing campaign the trailers use similar devices as found within the press pack, such as the hook, where no clear indication of the story is offered. The trailers,

unlike the press pack, did not focus on interviewing the actors, writer, director or producers who made the programme, but, instead, provided visual imagery taken from the programme, focusing on the location and the characters appearing in the series, but without being too specific about the story. The air of mystery is upheld by the first trailers, with sparse titles appearing signalling an unknown tension. The trailers tells us it is the 'Same Town', it is Broadchurch, but with 'New Secrets'. From the trailers we get visual indications of the dramatic nature of the series; from the lighting, where filters make the daylight scenes feel subdued, to the desperate expressions of the characters and snatches of conversation where accusations are made. From this we gather that something is not right, things are unsettled. There is a brooding feel to the trailer: we fade slowly in and out of scenes in a rhythmic fashion; characters are depicted against the wider environment, with a number of shots of the main characters standing on top of the huge looming cliffs; we literally stare into some of the character's eyes and see the pain they have suffered. There is a dark and noirish feel to the trailers, all underwritten by an atmospheric sound track. A visual association is being made to the first series, to its visual aesthetics, and to other programmes with a noirish feel, such as *Bron (Broen) (The Bridge)* (2011–present) and *Forbrydelsen (The Killing)* (2007–12) (Creeber 2015: 27–29). However, while these visual and aural devices help create a publicity image of a serious and moody programme, we will only be able to make sense of the storyline once we watch the programme.

Alongside such promotional forms, ITV, like many other media companies, now also uses social media to encourage public interest in their output (Davies 2015: 39–40). This is a sign that a form of discursive spreadability is occurring, as discussed earlier, with the promotional campaign moving across media platforms and texts – as they always have to a limited degree – with the hope that they will all work together to create a particular publicity image (Grainge and Johnson 2015: 119–47). However, all the forms of communication have

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to work together to convey a particular view of the programme and to support the overall strategic aims of the organization in relation to their content and output: '[t]he story, and not the communications channel, must always remain at the heart of every campaign' (Warren cited in Powell 2013: 67). Like the press release and the trailer, social media websites and other digital forms of communication use similar devices, such as the hook of the story being a mystery, and by connecting the programme, by association, to the success of the first series. The social media part of the campaign starts before the first screening and it continues thereafter into the engagement phrase. As shown below, ITV uses Twitter to tell us that the new series of *Broadchurch* is about to start, but little detail is provided.

Answers are coming.

[And]

Here's everything we know for sure about #Broadchurch Series two

Start – It returns tonight at 9pm on @ITV

End. (Twitter, 5 January 2015)

In this pre-engagement phase, with no pre-screenings being organized or DVDs being sent out the critics – whether professional critics working for the mass media or public critics working exclusively on the new media (Rixon 2015) – had to rely almost solely on the press pack and trailers provided by the broadcaster. As it might be expected, the broadcaster's attempt to maintain an embargo on the main storyline is the focus of many of the previews. Interestingly, the critics bring this device to the attention of the readership; they expose the way the broadcaster tried to position the programme in the public debate. Perhaps, in some ways, they are following a tactic of being honest, letting the reader know why they cannot provide a proper evaluative account as they have not yet seen any of the programmes. It is, as

Martin James of the *Sunday Times* noted, ‘so secret that this second series has been withheld from previewers, presumably to add mystique’ and, therefore, the real question becomes not who did the murder – ‘whodunnit’ – as obviously they have not been told, but ‘Whatgetsdone?’ (2015) – what happens in this series? Beyond the discussion of what the series might be about, many of the previewers, such as Tufayel Ahmed writing for the *Daily Mirror* (2015), end up reminding the reader of what happened in the last series, supporting the device of association used by the broadcaster to link this second series with the first very successful one. As Ahmed wrote, ‘Broadchurch is finally back! [...] So popular was Broadchurch that creator Chris Chibnall decided to write a second series – which finally begins tonight!’ (2015). Overall, this association between the series leads to a sense of anticipation, of a similar story to the first series, something the broadcaster has been keen to encourage.

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## 2: Engagement: Critics and viewers

While the broadcaster and producer might dominate the pre-engagement phase, it is the critic who comes to dominance at the start of the engagement phase. However, they are soon joined and, perhaps eclipsed, by the viewer who is also able to watch the broadcast programme and who can, if so inspired, engage with the associated public discourse through social media. While some critics, reviewers and previewers might echo some of the press release information, especially in programme guide sections of papers (Poole 1984: 51), others will soon start to critically reflect on the programme (Rixon 2011). Because of the critic’s position as an expert, with their regular access to the media and advance access to publicity material and previews of programmes, they are able, at least at the start of the engagement phase, to play an important role in framing the programme for the viewer and helping to shape and mediate an initial public response. They are, at least for this moment, dominant players in the engagement occurring around the programme.

While the critics had come to anticipate what the focus and storyline of the new series of *Broadchurch* might be in the pre-engagement phase, they now had the answers. From the first week we see, from some critics, a sense of disappointment, though, at the same time, with an acceptance that it offers something that could still be exciting or interesting. While the first series was about a murder and the suspense of trying to track down and to work out who did it, the ‘plotline’ of the second series, as Andrew Billen of *The Times* put it, ‘[is] a kind of repeat, a bit like Ellie’s new job, back in uniform as a traffic cop. *Broadchurch* was not moving on. More interestingly it was digging deeper [...] it was wilfully, wonderfully, brilliantly disappointing’ (2015: 19). The focus, at least as it appeared in the first few weeks, was on the trial of the murderer from the first series and was a twist many critics did not see coming, partly as the press release kept this information secret. For Nicole Vassell (2015) of the *Daily Telegraph*, this succeeded: ‘[a]fter captivating millions week-by-week, there is a lot at stake to ensure that Series 2 can match up to its initial success – but the first reviews agree that it’s off to a great start’. Most reviewers, especially those writing in the quality papers, seemed to think that the focus of the series worked. They suggested that Series 2 of *Broadchurch* was of a similar quality as the first series, supporting the view of the publicity image, and thought it would be a ‘must see’, ‘water cooler’ piece of television. For these critics, the new series, like the previous one, seemed to fit their tastes and underlying cultural values and, possibly, those of their readers. For example, Andrew Billen, writing for *The Times*, argues that it is, ‘[e]xpansively told, imaginatively filmed [...] and with an extraordinary ensemble cast that churns the narrative like waves in a harbour’ (2015: 19). In many ways, with its focus on the inner psyche of its characters, emphasis upon location and overall dark feel, the series shared many similarities with contemporary Nordic noir television series (Creeber 2015), a form of programming arguably mostly watched by the middle classes in the United Kingdom (Duerden 2012) and found, at least initially, on the



highbrow niche channel BBC4 (Moran 2013: 343). However, for some critics writing for the mid and low brow press, the more introspective focus of the series was not successful, partly as it lacked the more popular elements from the first series such as a clear storyline centred on the hunt for a murderer. As David Stephenson, writing for the *Sunday Express*, wrote about *Broadchurch*, ‘[y]ou can only mess with an audience so much. Like I care, but not admitting the confession from Joe Miller was ridiculous’ (2015: 44). It would seem that critics, by taking such positions on a programme, are in tune with the strategies or aims of their employer organization, producing copy to engage and attract a particular audience demographic; though working tactically, as de Certeau (1984: 29–42) might argue, against the publicity image of the broadcasters, as they raise some criticisms about the programme. Interestingly, while the reviewers concentrated, at least for the initial couple of weeks, on the court room storyline, the series soon came to focus on another murder, one pre-dating that of the first series, allowing *Broadchurch* to become a more traditional ‘who done it’.

While many critics, at least for the first week or so, gave more or less glowing reviews, over the following weeks most shifted their attention towards public criticisms appearing on social media and to a discussion about a supposed large drop in viewing numbers. One of the two main criticisms raised by the public on social media related to sound, dubbed ‘mumblegate’ following problems of audiences not following what was being said (Carter 2015). Then, later, questions were raised over the portrayal of the trial, which was referred to by some as ‘legalgate’ (Wilkie 2015). As Stephanie Takyi (2015) writing for the *Daily Express* argued in relation to ‘legalgate’:

[d]uring last night’s anticipated episode it was the initial crown court scenes that attracted heaps of disapproval with some fans labelling it ‘twaddle’.

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Viewers voiced their concerns about normal legal processes being disregarded – with some commenting on potential witnesses sitting in court, listening to proceedings before they gave evidence.

What is interesting is that at this stage the focus of the mediated public discourse found in the secondary texts moves away from the narrative of the primary text – away from the concerns of the broadcasters and critics – to the tertiary text and discussions by the public relating to the sound and the legal underpinning of the programme.

Critics responded to these criticisms in different ways, as many writing for the quality papers became defensive trying to uphold their original view of the programme, while others, mostly those working for the more popular papers, came to support these criticisms. Those supportive of the programme, such as Vicky Frost (2015), argued that while there were inconsistencies they should be accepted, as it was meant to be a drama and not an authentic view of court procedures. As Frost wrote in the *Guardian*,

[...] [q]uite a lot has been written about procedural inconsistencies in *Broadchurch's* court scenes – and there will doubtless be some views about whether DS Miller would be made to testify against her husband (I had been wondering about this very thing). But for dramatic reasons, we had to see Ellie tell her side of the story.

The critics, by engaging with readers' complaints, in different ways, could be viewed as struggling to re-establish their position as key arbiters in the critical debate, those that should be shaping public opinion and not following it.

After a few weeks the debate changed again, with critics and reviewers beginning to report that there had been a huge drop in viewing numbers (Buckley 2015). However, while the initial audience figures for ITV1 suggest that there was a significant reduction, from 8.59 million to 6.97 million, the seven-day consolidated figures, including ITV1HD, ITV+1 and time shifted viewing, showed only a slight drop, from 10.85 to 9.42 million. Indeed, the viewing figures for both series were similar, with Series 1 attracting an average of 9.4 million viewers, compared to Series 2 that attracted an average of 9.2 million (BARB 2015). Such different viewing figures illustrate the problematic nature of a traditional view of ratings in the digital age and the perplexing question of what to include and at what stage (Grainge and Johnson 2015: 120). For some critics and members of the public, the initial drop for ITV1's viewing figures from week one to two seemed to support their view that this new series was a failure. For at least one reviewer, it is not so much 'broadchurch' than 'boredchurch' (Methuen 2015). Other reviewers and critics echoed this view, being less impressed with the series as it went on, with one writer suggesting that the reason for the initial secrecy was that '[t]he producers didn't dare let anyone discover that the second series of their Bafta-winning detective drama is a heap of old codswallop that makes no sense at all' (Stevens 2015). For Jemma Buckley writing for the *Daily Mail* online, '[s]o many viewers are now dismayed at the quality of the second series of the hit ITV show that they are turning off in droves – with more than two million giving up since it returned three weeks ago' (2015). These critics, writing for the popular press, could be viewed in some ways as siding with and reflecting the views of their readers, as expressed by those active on the social media. Interestingly it is over the criticisms relating to the drop in viewing figures that we see the only main interjection by those who made the programme in the engagement phrase. As Chris Chibnall, the writer, noted on Twitter: '[l]ittle bit in shock: 10.9m consolidated figure for #Broadchurch ep 1. If you watched, thank you!' (2015b).

**Comment [K8]:** Please insert the page number if applicable.

For the initial coverage, appearing before the broadcast, and even for the first reviews, critics focused on the mystery nurtured by the publicity image; they wrote about the actors and creatives working on the programme and the association with the first series. In some ways they were, initially, relying on information provided by the broadcaster. Only as the series was broadcast did they start to explore the series in more detail. There was some division in the way the series was written about, with those writing for the quality newspapers being more supportive than those working for the popular newspapers. Over time, as more public criticisms appeared via social media, and as the numbers watching apparently dropped, critics began to focus more on these complaints and problems. It was as if, at least at this stage, the tactics of the audience had overcome the strategies of the broadcasters and even critics. The viewer, or at least those active on social media, seemed to be setting the agenda.

### **3. *Post-engagement: Consensus?***

When the broadcast of a TV series ends it remains, for a little while, as part of a public debate. The critics might offer a few more reflections on how the series went, and the public might talk with friends about what they thought, perhaps also sharing their views on social media. In this post-engagement phase broadcasters and producers might also continue to engage with the discourse around their programme for a short period, perhaps trying to shape its eventual critical positioning or standing; which might be part of their strategy to gain awards and prestige. For example, when *Broadchurch* had finished screening, Chris Chibnall (2015a) wrote a piece in the *Guardian* about why he had kept out of discussions about the problems or criticisms relating to the series, especially ‘legalgate’, and why he felt the programme was unduly criticized. His main argument was that, first, they got legal advice and felt that what they showed could and does sometimes happen and, second, that it is a drama. They had to shorten things to fit into the eight one hour episodes. Third, he notes that

it was still a very successful series, which only had a small drop in viewing figures from the first series (see the discussion of viewing figures earlier). However, on the whole, most broadcasters and producers soon reduce their marketing effort once the broadcast of a programme has ended, putting their energies into promoting new up-and-coming programmes.

But, as the public discussion ends, what memory is left of a programme and who provides the summation, whether or not completely accepted by everyone? One could argue that the public discussions found on social media often lack direction, touching on many different areas and, mostly, being rather trivial, made up of a mix of complaints, praise, criticisms and support (Corner 2013: 8). Such discussions have no guiding figure, no one to summarize the main views. In a way they exhibit all the signs of being more of a dialogue between many about television and its output, rather than a critique. It would be very hard to suggest that one particular view or public opinion emerges from such online interactions. Likewise, as noted above, the broadcaster and producers might, as Chris Chibnall did, enter into debate in the post-engagement phrase, especially if they are trying to defend their programme or to position it in such a way to help it win awards, but in most cases they move on quickly to promote their next programme. Therefore, I would suggest it is the critic, whether writing for the traditional media or via new technologies, who provides the longer lasting, most visible and reflective account of a programme or TV series. It is their accounts that will be looked towards when people talk about the programme in the future.

As the second series of *Broadchurch* ended, critics provided a final reflection; one that took account not just of their views but also reflected upon some of the feelings of their readership and the wider audience, partly known to the critic from the opinions articulated by those active on social media:

*Guardian*

[...] judging this new run by the ratings-smashing standards of the first is perhaps unfair. A good few million people still want to see the verdict in the trial, that's destroyed the victim's parents, and a resolution to the old case that nearly destroyed David Tennant's pale sleuth, DI Alec Hardy. Tonight offers some closure. ( Seale 2015)

**Comment [K9]:** Please insert the page number if applicable.

*Daily Mail*

Broadchurch's final twist left some fans of the murder mystery disappointed last night as stars David Tennant and Olivia Colman confirmed they will return for a third series.

And while some viewers were excited to learn at the end of the episode that the show will return, others took to Twitter to complain they had seen enough. (Crossley 2015)

**Comment [K10]:** Please insert the page number if applicable.

www.cultbox.co.uk

If you are one of the people who felt Season 2 lagged behind plot-wise and never really seemed to get going, there is a good chance that you found last night's instalment anti-climactic. That said, despite the season's lower points, I really enjoyed the finale overall. (Cowan 2015)

**Comment [K11]:** Please insert the page number if applicable.

As one can see, there were differences. As discussed earlier, many of the critics writing for the quality press viewed the programme, despite all of its problems, as a success. And this was reflected in their final reviews, such as that shown above by Jack Seale (2015) writing for the *Guide*, the Saturday art/listings guide of *Guardian*. He suggests that, while there were

failings, the programme was not a simple crime series and provided a complex exploration of how a community faced up to a murder committed there and, therefore, deserved some respect. Those writing for the popular press were more critical. Throughout the programme's run they had engaged with, and often supported the public's criticisms, relating to the sound, realism and muddled story. But while highlighting these problems, many were still supportive of the series. The comments voiced by critics online were more mixed. Some echoed those of the mass media, looking forward to a new series, while others were in disbelief that another *Broadchurch* would be produced. The final reflections of the critics provide a summation of the status of the programme and public debate; they were, at least for this broadcast, the last public word in the wider mediated discussion about the programme. For most, it would seem, *Broadchurch* was a success, but not on the same scale as the first series. It is the critic, in this way, that provided the last word on the programme on behalf of the public; they provide the public memory of the series.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I have outlined and explored a particular concept for understanding the active and fluid way broadcasters, critics and the public engage with each other around the evolving meaning and cultural status of a TV series; a way of understanding a discursive interaction happening over a period of time. This engagement is constituted and experienced through and informed by secondary texts, such as reviews and press releases, and tertiary texts, including online discussions and social media. The discourse is dynamic with, at different moments, particular actors being more dominant and able to articulate their views in the discussion than others. Behind such interplay and engagement different forms of power are at work. Indeed, for Lury (2004), producers, with their marketing and promotional finance and expertise, are always in a stronger position than consumers in any interaction. Broadcasters making and

promoting television programmes and newspapers, and those providing space for critics to write about such output, each have their own specific strategies or aims. Though, for the broadcaster, they also have more implicit aims, as Hartley argues, to create and recreate the kinds of audiences they need: '[s]ince audiences don't exist prior to or outside of television, they need constant hailing and guidance on how-to-be-an-audience' (1992: 117). Indeed, in the digital era as the relationship between broadcasters and viewers has changed, broadcasters have had to find new ways to manage the expectations of the viewer (Grainge and Johnson 2015: 119–20). One way they support their explicit organizational strategies, as well as implicit needs, is to try to shape the wider public discourse around their output. As I have shown, to do this, broadcasters will use marketing and promotion techniques to create a particular publicity image, while, in their turn, newspapers will employ journalists, writers and critics to produce output to fit their needs.

However, while broadcasters are influential at certain moments in shaping the discourse appearing around television and its output, such as in the pre-engagement phase, the critics and audiences can resist such strategies by employing tactics which allow other views and meanings to appear; e.g. critics might focus on exposing the workings of the devices used within the publicity image and, likewise, the audience might come to highlight aspects of the programme not touched on in the press release or by the critics. There is a struggle going on, throughout the life of a media production, between powerful corporate concerns which produced it and the less powerful viewers and critics who consumed it.

I have argued that it is the critic, whether working for the traditional or new media, who is best placed in the post-engagement phase to play an important role to create a collective memory of the programme. While the public is able to engage in the debates, much of what they produce is conversational in tone, it is not sustained and often lacks the profile to attract many readers (Rixon 2015; Corner 2013). In turn, broadcasters' promotional and



marketing efforts will mostly move on quickly to new programmes when a series finishes and are, arguably, ill-suited to offer a form of independent critical reflection. It is therefore the critic who, whether based in the traditional media or operating in the new media, provides a sustained and accessible summation of the public discourse, but one filtered through their values and needs. As the mainstream audience comes to forget the programme, it is the critic who will often provide revisionist views of the programme or will use it in canonical discussions as other programmes appear. Though with new forms of access to television material the public is now better placed than before to revisit themselves past programmes.

However, as argued in this article, we must accept that the critic is not completely free or autonomous in their reflection on the programme. Organizations, such as the broadcaster and newspaper media, with their specific strategies have, until now, had the means by which to overdetermine the resulting critical and popular discourse found within TV criticism. They are able to shape programme information supplied to critics and will employ critics who follow a certain line or uphold certain values. Likewise, increasingly, public discussions appearing on social media feed into the public debate helping to set the agenda followed by the critics. Additionally the traditional critic is being challenged by new public critics working online who exist without the same relationship with the industry or employers (Rixon 2015). Therefore, to understand how a programme takes on a shared meaning and a particular cultural status requires more than an evaluation of the text, however good and convincing this might be. It also needs an understanding of the engagement that occurs between the industry, the critics and the public around television and its outputs, an engagement which is dynamic and fluid in nature.

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


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